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29 July 1986

Talking Points for ADDIBolivia: Operation Blast Furnace

The joint US and Bolivian antidrug raids continued to have mixed results over the past week.

- Communication difficulties and refueling problems for the US Blackhawk helicopters have caused some delays, and the teams continue to find no evidence of drug-related activities at many of the sites on their preselected list of targets.
- Nevertheless, a large cocaine processing laboratory complex was seized in northern La Paz Department on 23 July, the second such laboratory complex discovered since the operation began on 18 July. Cocaine residue at the site indicates that the complex was recently used although no traffickers or drugs were present.
- information on impending operations continues to leak out to the traffickers.

Commo
fuel

23 July
second
complex
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The Bolivian government appears to have the support it needs to continue operations for the time being, although criticism remains strong in some quarters.

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- Hugo Banzer, leader of Bolivia's second-largest political party, has publicly endorsed the operation.
- the Bolivian General Staff met last week to discuss Operation Blast Furnace and that most senior officers view the operation favorably.
- On the other hand, some Bolivian opposition politicians have become more strident in their criticism of the operations, and a few have called for the impeachment of Paz Estenssoro. The chairmen of both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies have said publicly that they plan an investigation when Congress reconvenes on 6 August.
- Peasant unions involved in coca production in the Chapare region have held three protest demonstrations since the US forces arrived in Bolivia.

Gov't
OK.
(Banzer)

Chamber
+
peasant
demon.

The joint US-Bolivian operation is producing some collateral benefits for the overall antinarcotics effort in Bolivia.

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- Since the commencement of Blast Furnace, the Bolivians have taken the initiative to increase their own interdiction patrols in the Chapare and the Yungas, launch trafficker roundups in Santa Cruz, and step up efforts to interdict cocaine-processing chemicals along Bolivia's main transportation routes.
- The US Embassy reports that Bolivia's "floating population" of unemployed miners and peasants from other regions who had flocked to coca producing areas are now abandoning the Chapare.
- The protests and pending congressional debate over the operation have led the government to launch an unprecedented public affairs campaign on the negative impact of the illegal narcotics industry.

*Bolivian
interdiction*

*public
campaign*

Meanwhile, government talks with the petroleum workers union broke down again last week, and fuel workers may resume their strike, possibly causing fuel shortages that could delay the operation.

- Bolivian officials are concerned that the operation's effect on the underground economy may cause a run on the peso and have asked the US for backup funding should this occur. Already, demand for dollars at the Central Bank's weekly auctions is at twice the normal level, but an economic panic appears unlikely at this time.

*run on
peso.*

Chronology

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14 July 86 US troops arrived at Viru Viru Airport, Santa Cruz, Bolivia

18 July 86 Joint operations began: El Zorro cocaine processing complex siezed, resulting in the arrest of one Bolivian and the destruction of twelve buildings and cocaine processing chemicals found at the scene.

19 July 86 Three targets raided but were found to be clean.

20 July 86 Three targets raided but were found to be clean.

21 July 86 Hit OIA photoconfirmed target but found it to be clean. Attempted to hit a second target, but mechanical problems with the DC-3 prevented refueling and forced task team to return to base.

22 July 86 DC-3 still not operational. Used UH-60s to ferry press to site of lab hit on 18 July.

23 July 86 Second major cocaine processing lab seized. Site included eighteen buildings, two drying sheds, and 30 to 40 barrels. Cocaine residue found at the site indicates that the lab was recently in use although no traffickers or drugs were present.

24 July 86 No hits planned. Task force moved its forward operating base further north to an airstrip which is C-130 capable and would reduce dependence on problematic DC-3.

25 July 86 Two targets raided but were found to be clean. Operations suspended due to diversion of resources to search and rescue of missing press plane.

26 July 86 No hits planned due to problems with C-130. [redacted]
[redacted]
Visual recon followed.

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Joint US-Bolivian Narcotics Operations



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